

A Summary of Labor and Industries' Prevention Efforts 1980s – 1999

| Year | Activities |
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| 1980s | L&I offers Back Power Training Program for Employees. |
| | Series of rulings in workers' compensation cases hold that cumulative trauma claims are work-related. |
| | L&I therapist consultants begin to offer ergonomics job modifications to help injured workers return to work. |
| | L&I Safety and Health Compliance program starts to receive and respond to specific employee complaints related to cumulative trauma hazards in workplaces. |
| | L&I begins purchasing training videos on ergonomics that Washington employers can borrow through the video library (approximately 19 different titles available as of early 1999). |
| 1990 | Legislature creates Safety and Health Assessment & Research for Prevention (SHARP) program. Barbara Silverstein, Ph.D., is hired as research director of the program. |
| | L&I forms an action team to address ergonomics issues within the department. |
| | L&I publishes an educational booklet, Workplace Guidelines for VDTs. |
| 1991 | SHARP hires two ergonomists to help conduct research on ergonomics and the prevention of musculoskeletal disorders. (By 1999, SHARP produces 23 research reports and technical papers on ergonomics.) |
| | SHARP publishes an educational booklet, Cumulative Trauma Disorders: Carpal Tunnel Syndrome – A Preventable Disease. |
| | L&I forms an internal task force to develop guidance for safety and health compliance staff on responding to employee complaints of cumulative trauma hazards. |
| | L&I therapists begin providing in-house employer workshops on job analysis, office ergonomics and lifting. |
| 1992-1993 | L&I hires an ergonomist in WISHA to provide technical support for safety and health consultants and compliance officers. |
| | L&I develops and offers "Introduction to Ergonomics" and "Office Ergonomics," no-fee workshops for employers across the state. |
| | L&I drafts a WISHA Regional Directive (WRD) to provide guidance for safety and health compliance staff responding to employee complaints of musculoskeletal hazards. |
| | L&I convenes an advisory committee to help develop voluntary ergonomics guidelines. |
| | Arun Garg, ergonomics consultant, contracted to provide training and consultation service to L&I therapy and safety and health staff. |
| 1994 | L&I publishes an educational booklet, Fitting the Job to the Worker: An ergonomics program guideline, developed in concert with the advisory committee that met in 1993-1994. The booklet outlines the steps in setting up an ergonomics program to detect, correct and prevent work-related musculoskeletal disorders. Ergonomics training/information sessions first offered as part of the annual Governor's Industrial Safety and Health Conference. |
| 1995 | L&I hires a second ergonomist in WISHA to help provide technical guidance and consultations to interested employers. |
| | WISHA and SHARP ergonomists provide ergonomics training to selected safety and health compliance and consultation staff, therapists, vocational rehabilitation counselors and risk management staff in L&I field offices. |
| | Revised draft WRD on inspection guidance for musculoskeletal disorder complaints circulated among employer/employee stakeholders for comment. |
| | L&I convenes an advisory committee to revise the educational booklet, Workplace Guidelines for VDTs. |

Musculoskeletal Disorders in the Workplace

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| 1996-97 | L&I publishes Work-related Musculoskeletal Disorders, an analysis of workers' compensation data that shows the incidence and severity of MSDs by risk classification. |
| | L&I publishes Lessons for Lifting and Moving Materials, an educational booklet that identifies work areas, tasks and procedures that place employees at risk of injury. Describes and illustrates methods that help reduce the risk of injury. |
| | L&I publishes Office Ergonomics: Practical Solutions for a Safer Workplace, an in-depth guide to implementing ergonomics in office environments. Replaces Workplace Guidelines for VDTs. |
| 1998 | SHARP publishes Work-related Disorders of the Back and Upper Extremity in Washington State, 1989-1996, a research report outlining the cost and incidence of MSDs based on workers' compensation claims paid by the Washington State Fund. |
| | L&I's Office of the Medical Director co-sponsors a two-day conference for medical professionals: Treatment of Work-related Musculoskeletal Disorders. The conference includes a component on prevention strategies. |
| | WISHA and SHARP ergonomists provide a training course to selected L&I safety and health compliance and consultation staff on ergonomic evaluation of industrial work sites. |
| | L&I initiates a new program, Hazard Impact Partnership (HIP) to work with selected industries to reduce workplace safety and health hazards. The first industry selected under this program was the nursing home industry, with the goal to reduce a high incidence of lifting-related injuries. |
| | SHARP designs and commissions a survey that asks Washington employers about the physical demands of work in workplaces, number of musculoskeletal injuries and current prevention practices. Gilmore Research Services conducts the study of 5,000 employers. |
| | L&I decides to propose rule making to reduce musculoskeletal disorders in addition to voluntary, research and educational efforts. The draft WRD on inspection guidance for musculoskeletal disorder complaints is not pursued further. |
| | L&I conducts rule-development conferences in seven Washington cities to identify issues and concerns to be considered before developing a rule proposal regarding prevention of MSDs. |
| | L&I launches an ergonomics web site, /wisha/ergo. |
| January 1999 | L&I's SHARP program releases Musculoskeletal Disorders, Risk Factors and Prevention Steps, a report summarizing the results of a SHARP survey of Washington employers. |
| February 1999 | L&I convenes an advisory committee to discuss in more depth issues pertaining to work-related musculoskeletal disorders and ergonomic solutions. L&I will use the committee's advice to develop the language of a proposed rule and to help identify ways to enhance existing education, technical assistance and research on prevent of MSDs. |
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| | L&I's SHARP program releases Work-related Disorders of the Back and Upper Extremity in Washington State, 1990-1997, which provides updated data on workers' compensation claims involving musculoskeletal disorders. |
| April 1999 | L&I's SHARP program and the University of Washington co-sponsor a one-day ergonomics course for the forest products industry. |